

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE ACCEPTS AMENDMENT TO RESTORE BROADCAST OWNERSHIP CAP

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-22) today hailed the vote by the House Appropriations Committee to prevent one company from owning broadcast stations that reach more than 35 percent of U.S. television households. A member of the committee, Hinchey has been a leader in the fight against the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) weakening of media ownership rules.

"Today's vote represents a great victory in the battle to give ownership of the airwaves back to the public," said Hinchey. "Starting with the Reagan Administration, the FCC began abandoning its responsibility to protect the public interest. This erosion culminated in the establishment of the Powell Rules last month. It's up to Congress now to stand up for the American people. The committee's action today is a good first step toward that end."

On June 2 in a party-line vote, the FCC severely weakened the rules governing the ownership of media outlets. Among the changes was an increase in the percentage of U.S. television households that one company can reach from 35 percent to 45 percent. Through loopholes the increase actually makes it possible for a national television network to control up to 90 percent of the national television market.

The Appropriations Committee today is completing work on the Commerce-Justice-State spending bill for fiscal year 2004. U.S. Representative David Obey (WI-07), the ranking Democratic member of the committee, offered an amendment to prevent the government from spending any money on raising the ownership cap. This has the effect of repealing the rule change for one year. The committee voted 40-25 to add the amendment to the bill.

Hinchey has been a vocal critic of the FCC rule changes and is an original cosponsor of a bill to repeal them. He is currently working on his own legislation that would restore other public protections that have been lost over the past two decades.